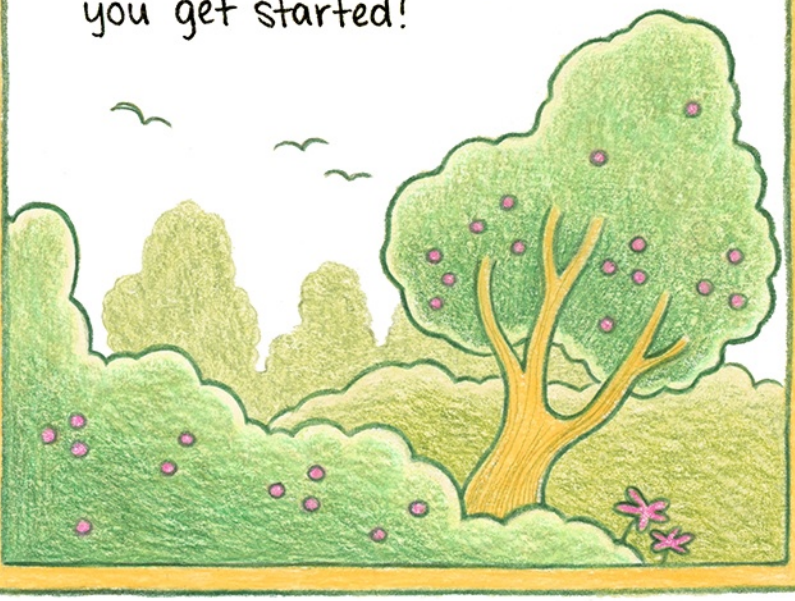
FRUIT
for
FREE
A FORAGING ZINE
BY MELANIE GILLMAN

Greetings!

I live in Columbus, Ohio, in USDA Zone 6. This zine reflects foraging knowledge I've learned here! The further away you live, the more plants in your area may vary.

This is not an exhaustive list of edible wild fruits - more of a sampler of relatively easy to find and ID species. I hope it helps you get started!



JUNEBERRY

aka serviceberry, saskatoon, shadbush...

Tasting Notes

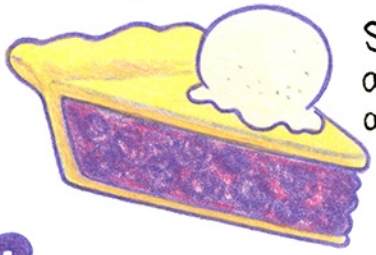
FRUIT: Apple + blueberry

SEEDS: Almond taste, sunflower kernel texture

Americans LOVE planting these as landscaping trees, but almost never EAT 'EM.
Which is good news for birds and human foragers alike!

Impossible to list all the good uses of this fruit!

Eat 'em right off the tree!
Use 'em anywhere you'd use blueberries!
Freeze jars of 'em for the winter!

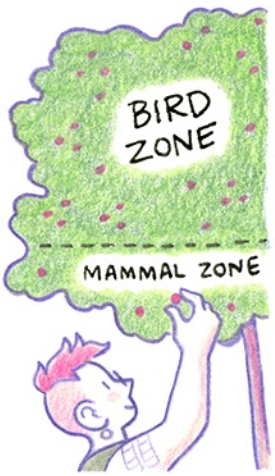


Saskatoon pie is a Canadian classic a lot of Americans have barely heard of!

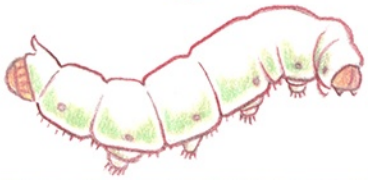
HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU LEAVE FOR ME?

This depends on how many grow in your area! "Take no more than 10%" is a good foraging rule of thumb.

If you stick to just the berries you can reach on fully grown trees, that should leave PLENTY in the upper branches for the birds.



Mulberries



In the early 1800s, people unsuccessfully attempted to start a silk industry in the US – importing silkworms and white mulberry trees from China.

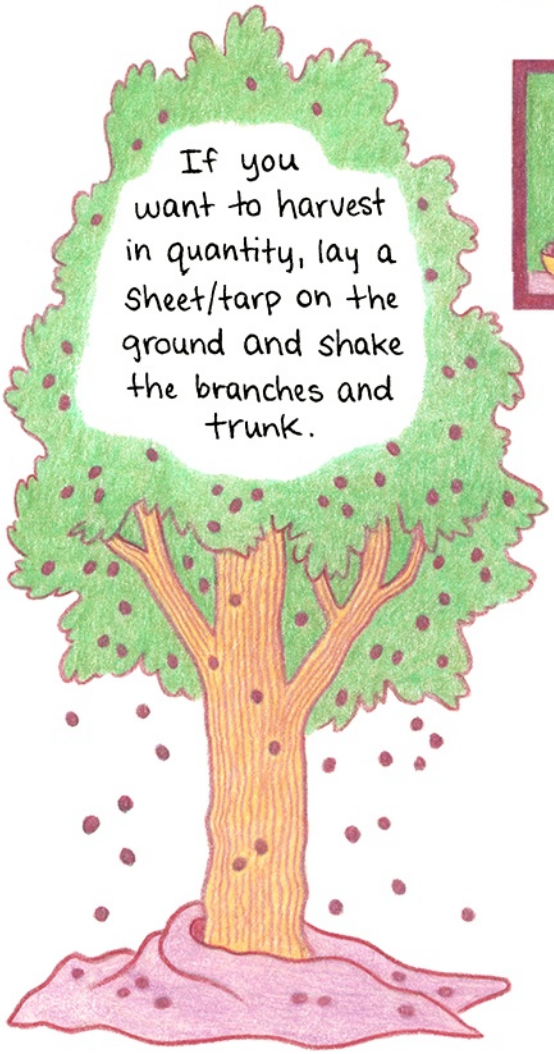
NOW WE HAVE RED (NATIVE) MULBERRIES & WHITE (INVASIVE) MULBERRIES

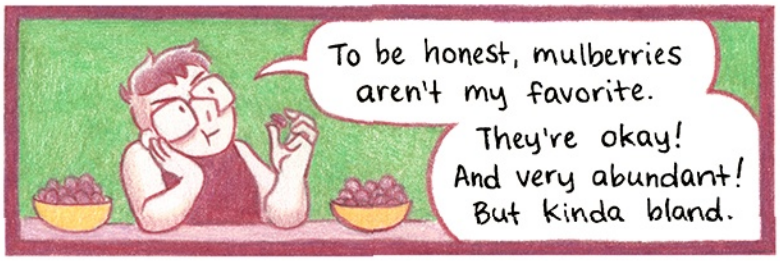
Confusingly: invasive white mulberries have hybridized with native red mulberries, so today, BOTH species usually have RED-BLACK FRUIT when ripe!

MORUS ALBA (white)

MORUS RUBRA (red)

The easiest way to distinguish them is the leaves. White mulbs have SHINY, SMALLER leaves, and red mulbs have LARGER, MATTE leaves.





Their flavor works best paired with lemon and sugar. Try them in pies, muffins, or jams!

Mulberry leaves are also edible – silkworms have the right idea!

BLACK RASPBERRIES

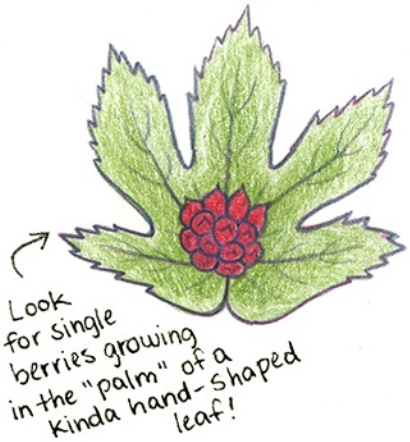
The best time to scout for black raspberries is the winter! The canes turn a beautiful lilac-magenta color that's easy to spot when everything else is brown.

They love to grow along the side of paths.

Pick the dark purple-black berries; leave red ones to ripen further!

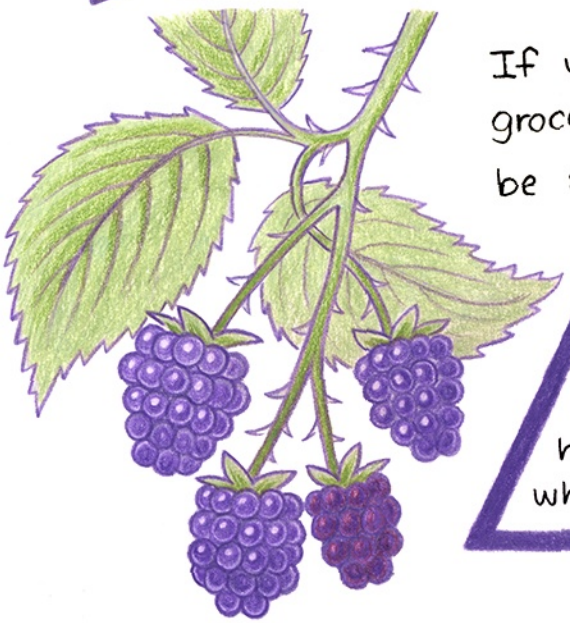
Raspberries are popular with new foragers, in part because "no compound berries are poisonous" is common advice!

There's at least one counterexample to this advice in eastern North America worth knowing — goldenseal. It's considered toxic (though it's sometimes used medicinally.)



Luckily, every time I see one in the wild:

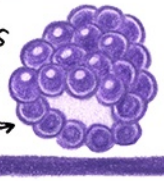
Blackberries



If you tend to be underwhelmed by grocery store blackberries, you might be surprised by wild blackberries! They're sweeter and feistier!

IS IT A BLACKBERRY OR RASPBERRY?

Blackberries have a solid white inside →



← Raspberries are hollow inside

Blackberries like sunshine and the sides of paths.
In my area, they ripen a few weeks after black raspberries, in the mid-summer heat.

BLACK BERRIES are a familiar enough fruit that they don't really need much explanation

ASKING PERMISSION

Generally, plants make fruit they want animals to eat (to spread their seeds.) But they want animals to eat the fruit only when the seeds are ready! Color, scent, texture, and flavor can all signal to animals that a fruit is ripe.

Another signal is how easily the fruit can be pulled off the plant. If you really have to yank on a fruit, it may not be ready! So, pick wild fruit like you're asking the plant's permission: "May I have this?" And if the answer is no, respect that and move on.

CRABAPPLES

DID YOU KNOW crabapples are just APPLES we didn't breed for size & sweetness??

I was lied to by SO MANY ADULTS as a kid...

ALL CRABAPPLES ARE EDIBLE!

They're not all TASTY, though.

Like regular apples, flavor varies widely!

Most US cities are FULL of crab-apples, though.

Why not take a tasting tour of your neighborhood til you find one you like?

TIP

Unsure if a crabapple is ripe? Check the seeds!

Brown=ripe

White/green =unripe

Anything you do with apples, you can do with crabapples! But two of my favorites are:

SLOW-COOKER CRABAPPLE BUTTER

WILD FERMENTED CRABAPPLE VINEGAR

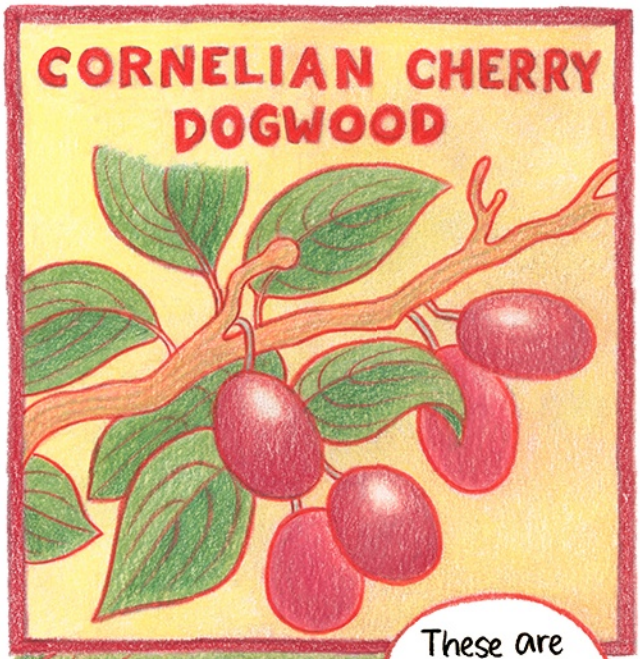
ARE CRABAPPLE SEEDS POISON?

Like regular apple seeds, crabapple seeds contain trace amygdalin (cyanide). You'd have to eat a LOT of seeds to notice any effects.

DOGWOOD

TWO DIFFERENT SPECIES OF EDIBLE DOGWOOD ARE COMMON LANDSCAPING TREES IN THE EASTERN U.S.

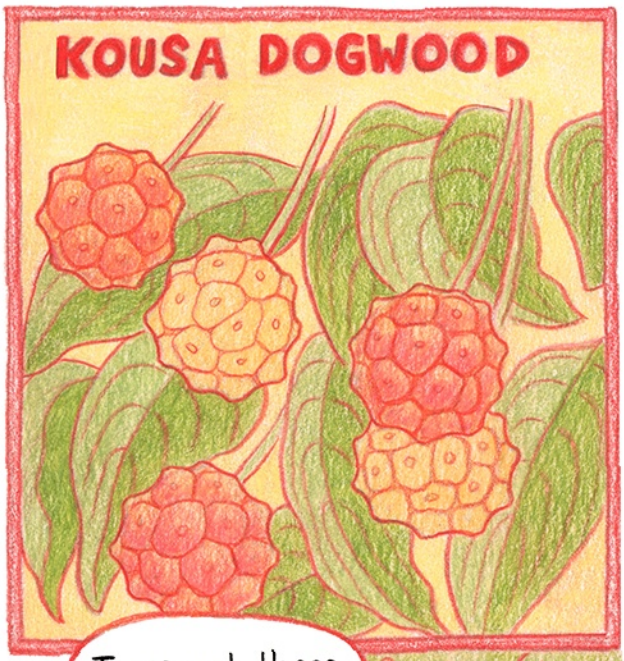
CORNELIAN CHERRY DOGWOOD



PICK THEM WHEN THEY'RE DARK RED & A LI'L SQUISHY

Not everyone's gonna love these. Even ripe, they're a bit astringent, and not super sweet. They make a great jam, though!

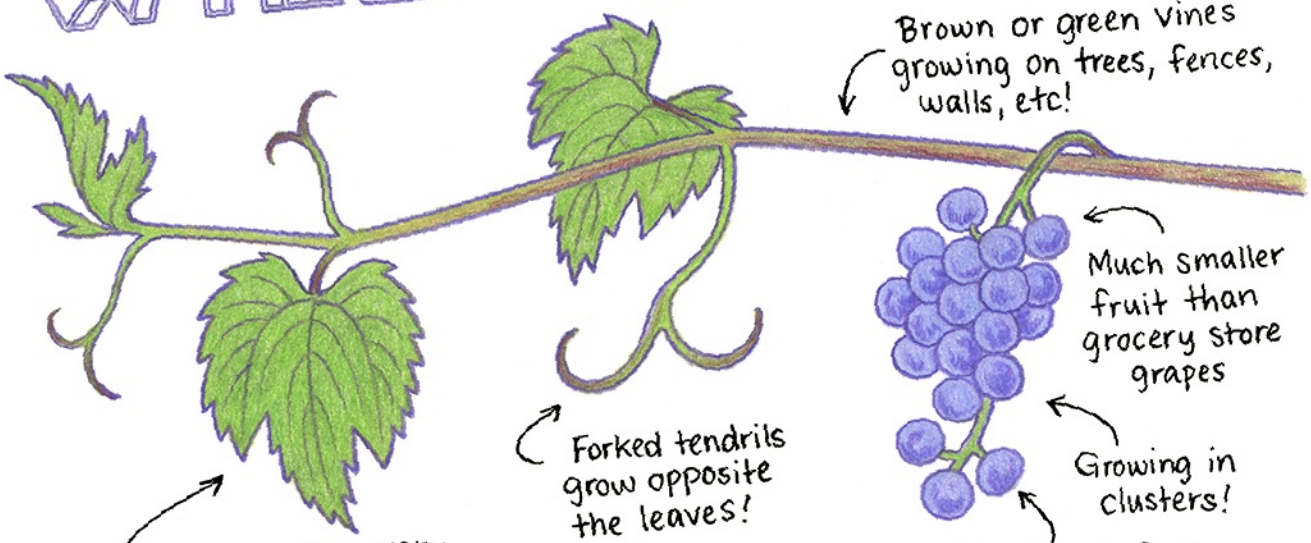
KOUSA DOGWOOD



The flavor is sweet & tropical; the texture is goopy or grainy.

Harvest a bunch and smoosh them through a strainer or food mill to remove the skins/seeds!

WILD GRAPES


Brown or green vines growing on trees, fences, walls, etc!
Much smaller fruit than grocery store grapes
Forked tendrils grow opposite the leaves!
Growing in clusters!
Leaves can vary from species to species, but look for that classic toothed grape leaf shape!
Dark blue/purple fruit when ripe, often with a lighter yeast bloom!

POISONOUS LOOKALIKES

CANADA MOONSEED has smooth (not serrated) leaf margins and crescent moon shaped seeds.

POKEWEED has bright magenta stems and very un-grape like leaves

VIRGINIA CREEPER has 5 toothed leaflets + much looser berry clusters

I have found gross grapes growing in pristine forests, and delicious grapes growing in pizza shop parking lots. You gotta wander & taste test!

IMPORTANT

If you're juicing wild grapes to make jelly or wine, refrigerate the juice overnight! Wild grapes are full of TARTARIC ACID, which can irritate your digestive tract in large quantities. The acid will crystalize and settle at the bottom of the jar overnight. Then you can pour the good juice off the top, or through a strainer!

YOU OWE IT TO YOURSELF TO TRY THE KING OF NORTH AMERICAN FRUIT!

Pawpaw

Start scouting in late summer & early fall!

I recommend searching near WATER – especially slopes by streams and rivers.

LOOK FOR: BIG GREEN FRUIT, OFTEN GROWING IN CLUSTERS

LOOK FOR: BIG, SORT OF "TROPICAL" LOOKING LEAVES

PS: Some hickory leaves look similar, but hickories are serrated & pawpaws are smooth!

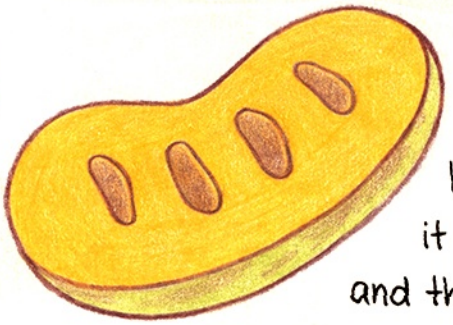
HICKORY

PAWPAW

The best way to harvest pawpaw is to shake the trees GENTLY.

Shake too hard and you'll just get unripe fruit, and risk weakening the tree's roots.

And if you hurt pawpaw trees I will GET U



Pawpaw pulp is sweet and custardy, with notes of banana and mango. Eat it when the fruit is squishy and the skin easily bruises brown!

PAWPAW CAUTIONS ⚠

A lot of people experience bad GI upset from eating underripe or baked/cooked pawpaw. If you wanna play it safe, just enjoy the fresh, ripe pulp!

Pawpaw skin can be composted, and to be a good citizen of the woods, return the seeds – ideally to a DIFFERENT spot than the place you harvested from. Pawpaw trees need genetically distinct pawpaws growing nearby to be cross-pollinated properly!

Autumn Olive

is not actually an olive, nor does it taste even remotely like one.

Look for shrubs growing in disturbed soil with abundant pea-sized red fruit.

If the fruit is speckled white...

and the underside of the leaves sparkle silver in the sun...

then cram that fruit in ya face!!

Autumn olive is an INVASIVE SPECIES in the United States.

By eating it, fruit foragers can help to curb its spread in their local ecosystem.

Poisonous lookalikes

will NOT have white-speckled fruit & silvery leaf undersides

Amur honeysuckle is the one I see most – it has SOLID red fruit.

WAYS TO EAT A LOT OF AUTUMN OLIVES

JAM
(tastes similar to cranberry sauce)

WINE
(one of my favorite feral fruit ferments)

FRUIT LEATHER
(great for hikes!)

Remember:

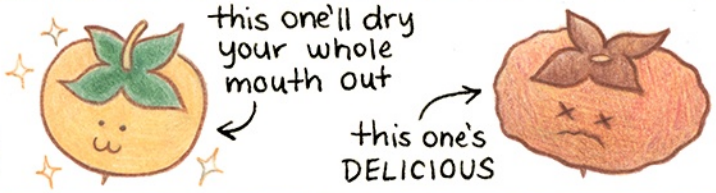
Every autumn olive you eat is a seed a bird won't spread!

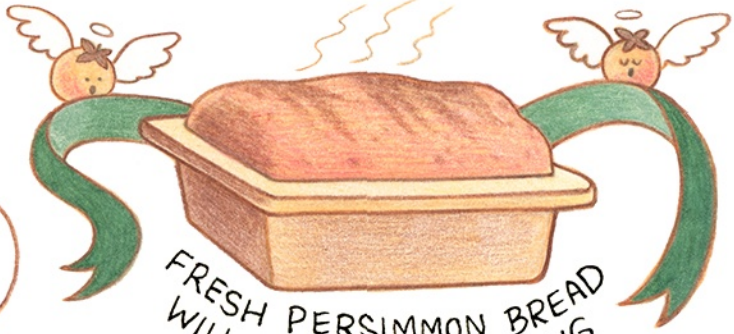
AMERICAN PERSIMMON

In late fall, after the trees have dropped their leaves, keep an eye out for trees with little peachy-orange fruits still hanging from the branches or dropped on the ground!

These extreme cuties are our NATIVE persimmon trees!

The trick with persimmons is to wait until they look VERY OVERRIPE to eat them. (Look for fruit on the ground!)





FRESH PERSIMMON BREAD WILL HAVE YOU HEARING ANGELS SINGING

ALSO

After collecting your pulp, I recommend returning the seeds to the woods. Give new trees a chance to grow for the next generation!

Callery Pears

aka Bradford Pears

OKAY SO like 60 years ago a bunch of big-brain geniuses at the USDA were like

HEY let's get everyone in America to plant callery pears!

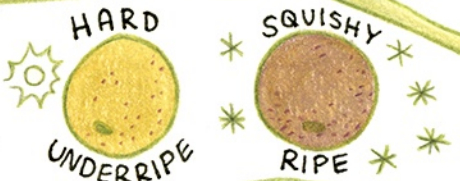
Nothing EVER goes wrong when we import a non-native species en masse!

AND NOW WE'RE ALL TRAPPED IN STINKY INVASIVE TREE HELL

One silver lining to these trees is: they produce a LOT of pears.

Most people don't realize they're pears 'cuz they're TEENY!

Harvest callery pears AFTER the first frost. It'll make the fruit sweet & squishy, like applesauce



But if you don't want to eat 'em raw, push the pulp through a mesh strainer (to remove the skins & seeds) and go wild.

The wintry spiced-pear flavor is lovely in ciders and baked goods!

JUST WHEN YOU THINK

Winter is upon us...

all is ruin...

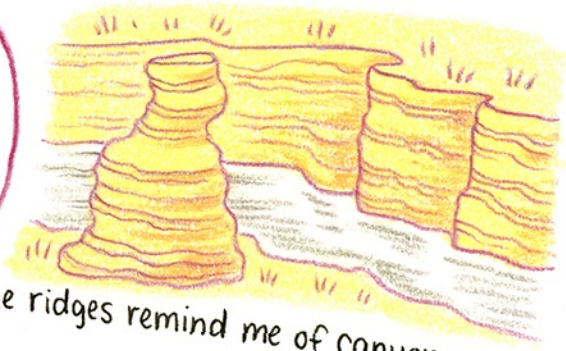
the hunger will take me soon...

HACKBERRY

IS READY TO HARVEST!

Hack-berry tree bark is VERY distinctive !!!!

Look for DEEP uneven ridges, made up of lots of thin bark layers!



The ridges remind me of canyon walls!

The fruit is dark reddish-purple and pea-sized. When ripe, it'll drop off the trees naturally (or with gentle shaking.)

Hackberries have two distinct layers:

← Soft, fruity flesh with a figgy taste

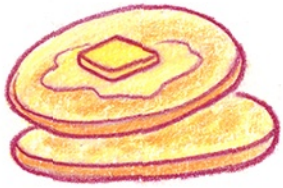
← An EXTREMELY HARD TINY NUT

Some people eat 'em straight, but every time I try, I feel like I'm gonna crack a tooth.

So instead, I make:

HACKBERRY MILK!!

After blending the hell outta 1 part hackberries + 1-2 parts water, pour through a clean cloth to strain out all the solids.



Use it like milk in your next pancake batch for the BEST GODDAMN PANCAKES OF YR LIFE

SAY THANKS!

Every piece of fruit you have ever eaten exists because a plant spent months turning sunlight into food, on purpose, so that animals like you could eat it.

SO WHEN YOU HARVEST, THANK THE PLANT.

Whisper it if you feel embarrassed at first, but do it. Do it even if you don't believe the plant will hear you— even if it is only a reminder to yourself.

That plant is your neighbor, and when your neighbor makes you food, you thank them.

And millions of plants have done this

Every year, for millions of years,

For every single one of your ancestors

And now, for you.

GRATITUDE WILL CHANGE HOW YOU FORAGE

A grateful recipient will not take too much, and will find ways to give back.

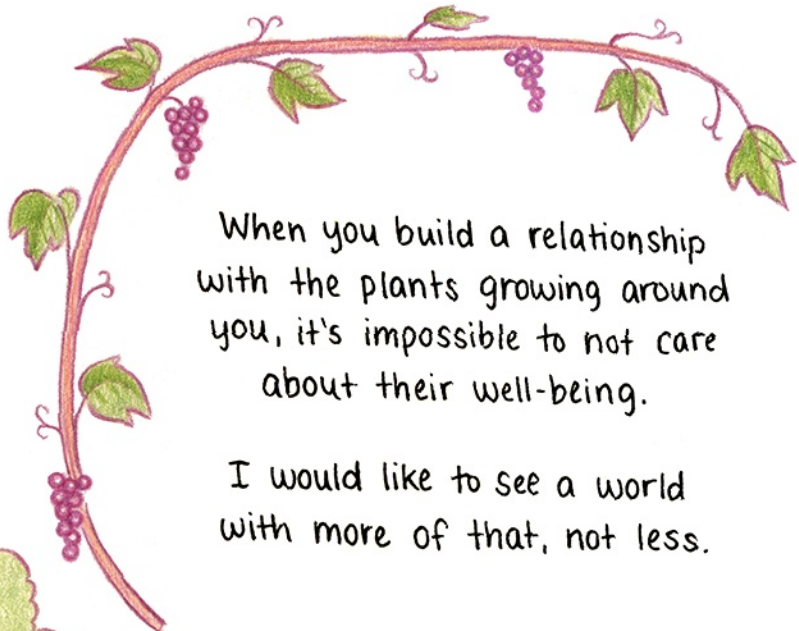
When I forage, I spend more time uprooting invasive plants than I do gathering food.

This helps curb the spread of invasive plants in my local woods, and also creates microdisturbances in the soil that may help native plants to germinate in their place.

This, too, is a way to say thank you to the forest that feeds me.

Done well, foraging is not a burden on your local ecosystem, but a benefit to it.

Many plants thrive best *with* human involvement, not in our absence.



When you build a relationship with the plants growing around you, it's impossible to not care about their well-being.

I would like to see a world with more of that, not less.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do Is Ask: Anishinaabe Botanical Teachings
by Mary Siisip Geniusz

Braiding Sweetgrass
by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Northeast Foraging
by Leda Meredith

Edible Wild Plants of Eastern/Central North America
by Lee Allen Peterson

Midwest Foraging
by Lisa M. Rose

The Forager's Harvest, Nature's Garden, and Incredible Wild Edibles
by Samuel Thayer